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ABSTRACT

The booklet offers general suggestions, a quiz, specific activities, and a checklist to increase children's awareness of the needs and characteristics of persons with disabilities. Preferred terminology is explained and ways to provide children with direct experiences with persons with disabilities are suggested. The brief quiz serves both to discover concerns and assumptions of students and to prompt group discussion. The 12 activities simulate deafness, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, visual impairment, mental retardation, and emotional disturbance. Other activities demonstrate the power of epithets and the technique of handicapping to increase fairness. Finally, a barriers checklist is provided for children to use in assessing their school. Four additional publications are recommended and five Maine organizations that can supply awareness materials, information, and speakers are listed. (DB)

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JUST LIKE ME!

DISABILITY AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

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The Maine Pla[illegible]ng and Advisory Council on D[illegible]pmental Disabilities is concerned with increasing the independence, productivity, and integration into the community of children and adults with developmental disabilities.

The lines of distinction between human beings are blurring. We now see that all people, regardless of their limitations and challenges, are people first and, as human beings, have needs and rights. We all want to love and be loved, to be happy, to feel productive and secure.

We are also beginning to realize that most people have disabilities of one kind or another. The differences lie mostly in degree, whether our disabilities are overt or hidden, in the ways we are able to adapt to our environment, in the attitudes of people around us and in the way we are treated.

The old saw about sticks and stones is usually untrue; words do hurt. Words reflect attitudes, and whether those words and attitudes exhibit hatred, fear, or pity, they can inhibit people from reaching their full potential, from becoming a part of their schools, work environments and communities.

When talking about persons with disabilities with students, emphasize that all people need and deserve understanding and respect. A person with a disability, no matter how severe or limiting that disability may be, is a human being; and the language that both disabled and non-disabled people use should reflect respect for that humanity.

It is more respectful to refer to a person first as an individual. Persons are not "epileptics" or "the mentally retarded," but "people with epilepsy" and "mentally retarded individuals." Words that show pity or revulsion should also be avoided. "Victim," "pitiful," "deformed," and "afflicted" all demonstrate attitudes that prevent people with disabilities from being integrated and independent. People with handicaps are people first, people who need to have their accomplishments emphasized, their limitations accepted.

This booklet has been prepared to help teachers, school guidance staff and principals enhance their own and their students' awareness of what it's like to have a disability, the feelings that all human beings share and the idea that each of us is unique.

The activities and suggestions here may also be valuable to public information campaigns conducted by consumer groups for the general public or specific policy-maker audiences.

Although the suggested setting for many of them is the school classroom, these activities can be adapted for use in public buildings, outdoor recreation areas, and work environments.

Some teachers have used such activities in their own classrooms, sometimes in conjunction with regular subject areas, sometimes as a distinct unit on handicaps. These ideas can be used school-wide with separate classrooms earmarked for each activity and students rotating among the rooms. The tools and instructions can be housed in a resource room or library to be borrowed by teachers throughout the school year.

As part of a total awareness program, adults and children with disabilities could be invited to speak to students. The format for presentations might be a panel discussion for a large group, a person with a disability as the "host" of the room or area where his or her disability is explored with activities or simulations, or a single speaker on one disability or what it's like to be disabled.

Siblings and parents of persons with handicaps can also be invited to talk with students who may relate better initially to a non-disabled person who lives with and cares about a person with disabilities. Some consumer and family groups have lists of members who volunteer to speak to groups about disabilities. A list of such groups is at the end of this booklet. Agencies who serve people with handicaps in your area may be willing to talk about handicapping conditions or to recruit disabled persons or their family members to speak to students.

The Kids on the Block puppets provide the experience of interacting with disabled children, of whom students can freely ask questions which they might be reluctant to pose to a real person. The contact for these puppets is also listed in the back of this booklet.

DISABILITIES QUIZ

This quiz can be used before beginning the activities both to discover the concerns and assumptions students have about people with handicaps and to prompt discussion about them.

Yes
No
Not sure

Is a person with a disability usually sick?

Yes
No
Not sure

Can a person who is blind go to the store?

Yes
No
Not sure

If someone can't talk, do you think he's retarded?

Yes
No
Not sure

Were people with disabilities born that way?

Yes
No
Not sure

Do you feel sorry for someone who is disabled?

Yes
No
Not sure

Can blind people hear the same as other people?

Yes
No
Not sure

If a person is retarded, does it mean that he will never grow up?

Yes
No
Not sure

Are all deaf people alike?

Yes
No
Not sure

Can a person in a wheelchair be a teacher?

Yes
No
Not sure

Do all children have a right to go to your school?

Discussing the Quiz

1. Disabilities are not illnesses. They cannot be cured. Children may understand the explanation that the disability is part of the person, just like blue eyes or athletic ability.

2. If there are no braille numerals on elevator buttons, ramps into a store, or buses which are accessible to people with mobility impairments, children may not see people with disabilities in stores and other public places often. Disabled people adapt and adjust to their limitations; often their communities do not.

3. Some people who cannot talk may not be intellectually limited at all. They may have a disability like cerebral palsy which physically prevents them from speaking. They may have a hearing loss which has kept them from modelling normal speech, or they may have learning disabilities which hinder them in translating what they want to say into saying it.

4. Some children fear that they can "catch" a disability. This is, of course, not true. Many disabilities are evident at birth or soon after, although some are caused by accident or illness in later years.

5. Feeling sorry for a person with a disability or thankful that you do not have one often creates an extra burden for the person with a handicap. Most people have come to see their disabilities as a part of themselves, a part which may make their life different from the lives of other people but which does not make their life tragic. Most prefer respect, like everyone else.

6. People who are blind or who have limited mobility are often talked to in loud voices. Sometimes people with disabilities are thought to have superpowers in their non-handicapped senses. Although a person may be both mobility-impaired and deaf or a person who is visually impaired may have developed more acute hearing than most people, people with disabilities want the limitations they do have accepted but do not want people to expect either other disabilities or extraordinary powers they do not have.

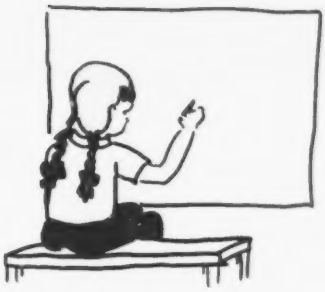
7. People who are retarded do learn more slowly than other people, but they deserve the dignity and the experience of learning skills and living in the community as adults.

8. People with even the same disability are as different from one another as are other people. Degree of disability may be different and the same disability can affect different people in different ways. Some deaf people are married, some single. Some enjoy skiing, some prefer reading. Each person is unique.

9. The biggest handicap people have is other people's perceptions of them. Wheelchairs are simply devices, like glasses or bicycles, that help us do better what we want and need to do. Just because someone uses an aid, a device to help, does not mean that person cannot be independent and productive.

10. Federal and state laws mandate that all handicapped children be educated in regular public schools and in regular classrooms when possible. There are also laws which prohibit discrimination on the basis of handicap much like the laws that prohibit discrimination because of race, sex, religion or ethnic background.

ACTIVITIES

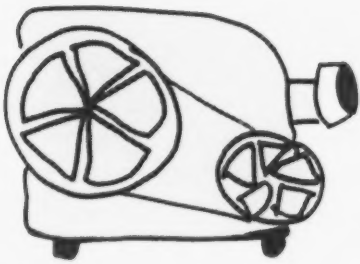


ACTIVITIES

Why is it hard to read lips?
(hearing impaired, reading and writing)

Materials: paper, pencils, blackboard, chalk, eraser, list of words unfamiliar to the kids.

Activity: Aside from the fact that so many words do not appear clearly on the lips of the speaker, lip-reading is difficult because your eyes must always be alert. If you blink or look away, you might miss a whole idea. Write a word on the blackboard but as soon as you write one letter, erase it. The children must look down to write the letter that has just appeared. Write and erase quickly enough so that many of the students miss some of the letters. Ask what the word is. Then do a few words saying the letter aloud as you write it. Which way is easier—getting letters by just looking or by both looking and listening? Why?



What is it like being deaf?
(hearing impaired, writing, group activity)

Materials: short movie, written questions.

Activity: Show a short, interesting movie or cartoon with the sound off. Ask the children to write answers to some questions about the movie. Some of the questions should be factual questions about the plot that cannot be answered without hearing the script. Some should be ones that can be answered on what is seen. Show the movie again with sound. Ask the questions again. After someone answers the questions correctly, find out what some of the answers were when no one could hear them. Other questions you might discuss: What were you able to understand even though you couldn't hear? What senses can a deaf person use to understand what's going on? What problems would you have if you were deaf?

Crazy Writing
(learning disabilities, writing, group activity)

Materials: mirror (at least 6" x 6")

Activity: Ask students to take notes on a presentation or film, using their non-dominant hand. Writing by looking into a mirror also demonstrates perceptual problems. Students look at the mirror which reflects their writing but do not look down at their paper. Have the children talk about how it feels. Left-handed students might talk about how it feels to have the world designed for right-handers.

Limited Vision
(visual impairment, group activity)

Materials: saran wrap or baggies, masks, scissors, tape, books, puzzles.

Activity: Visually impaired people have different degrees of sight. Create a visual impairment by taping different numbers of layers of saran wrap or baggies to the eye holes of a Halloween mask. Have the children attempt a variety of tasks while wearing the masks: read books with different sizes of print, put together puzzles, walk to the bathroom, play a board game. Have them talk about how it feels and what makes it easier, like larger print, auditory cues, being familiar with the space and task.

All Thumbs
(physical disabilities, group activity)

Materials: masking tape, raisins, nuts, pudding.

Activity: Sometimes kids with physical disabilities don't have good muscle control. With masking tape, tape down the fingers of the child's weaker hand, leaving only the thumb free. Give each child a cup of raisins or a dish of pudding to eat using only that hand. Divide the children into pairs. Let one child in each pair feed the other a dish of pudding. Trade places.

Discussion: How did you feel during these experiments? Did you find ways to overcome the problems of eating when you had less control of your hands? How does it feel to be fed by someone else?

What's in the Bag?
(visual impairment, group activity)

Materials: paper bag and miscellaneous objects.

Activity: People with visual impairments develop their tactile sense as a way to learn about the world. Put 10-15 objects in a paper bag and blindfold students. Without any verbal cues have them reach in and identify an object by feel. Place a number of coins and bills in the bag. Ask students to identify the amounts. Discuss how blind people learn to make change.

Problems in Muscle Control
(physical disabilities, group activity)

Materials: blanket, towels, wobbly chair.

Activity: People with cerebral palsy are often floppy or their bodies seem rigid. These experiments will help students understand how distracting and difficult it can be to have these problems.

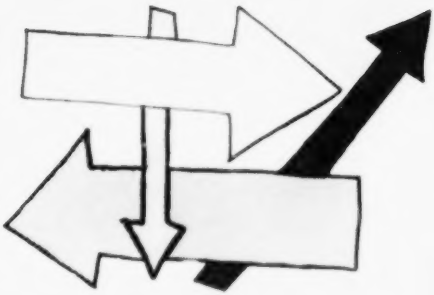
- Lie down on the floor. Try to get up without using your head.
- Get tightly wrapped in a blanket. Try to roll over.
- Have the children sit in a small group while you read a story or carry on a discussion. While they are listening, have them keep dropping their heads loosely. Can they follow what's going on?
- Sit in a wobbly chair (or some other precarious position that you can devise). After a while note how much attention and strength you must spend on keeping your balance.

Clumsiness
(physical disabilities, mental retardation, learning disabilities, group activity)

Materials: pairs of thick socks, shirts, sweaters, shoes, beads and string, ruler.

Activity: Some people have trouble with fine motor coordination. This is because their muscles are weaker and they need more time and practice to learn how to move. Each child puts a pair of thick socks on each hand. With the socks on tie shoes and button a shirt, try to string beads. Tie a ruler between the kids' ankles so that their legs are stiff and apart from each other. Have the children walk down the hall and back, slowly. How would they feel if people laughed or stared at them or imitated the way they walked?

Discussion: Some people who have these kinds of problems are mentally retarded. Their muscles are weaker and their coordination is poor. But not everyone with these problems is mentally retarded. Discuss this assumption. Can you assume that someone who can't use his hands is retarded? Can you assume that someone who can't walk well is doing it to amuse you?



Too Many Directions
(mental retardation, learning disabilities, group activity)

Materials: list of 15 simple instructions.

Activity: Ask two children to come to the front of the room and sit in chairs back to back. Explain that some children with mental retardation or learning disabilities find it confusing to follow even a few simple directions. To illustrate how frustrating this would be, read a list of 15 directions, such as "stand up, hands on shoulders, turn around, spell your name backwards." Tell the two children that you will read the list through once and then you want them to follow the directions in order. Have several pairs of children try this experiment.

Discussion: Ask them all how they felt trying to remember everything. How would they feel if they felt this overwhelmed by other people whenever they were talked to? How could they talk to a child who is retarded so that the child would feel comfortable and would understand?

It Bugs Me
(emotional disturbance, group activity)

Materials: blackboard and chalk or large paper and markers.

Activity: All of us experience frustrations daily and we must learn to accept feelings of frustration and cope with frustrating situations. A common cause of frustration is when a person wants something but his or her wish is blocked. The obstacle may be physical, temporal, interpersonal, or cognitive. Sharing personal frustrations and ways to deal with them can help children accept their feelings and hear creative solutions. Have the class or smaller groups make a "bug list" on the blackboard. Make five columns to record individuals' frustrations in terms of goal, block, source of block, location and feelings. You can then summarize by identifying common incidents and talk about solutions or coping strategies.

Epithets—the Power of Words
(all disabilities, group meeting)

Materials: paper and pencil

Activity: This activity is to help children understand where epithets (names) come from and how to respond to them. Ask the children if they know the differences between "connotation" and "denotation." Each word has both a connotation, subjective, evaluative dimension, and denotation, an objective reference. When we respond to other people's words we respond to what the words connote to us as well as what they denote. The connotations of words vary from person to person and group to group according to their positive and negative values and standards. An epithet is a negative name that people use about others. Often epithets have to do with a person's race, religion, disability, sex, appearance, political beliefs, all things which are important to a person's identity. Have the children give examples of epithets they've heard. Make a chart indicating epithets referring to each of these aspects of a person's identity.

Have a discussion on why people call others names. Ask the children why. Responses might include lack of respect, dislike of a person's behavior, need to feel important or better than other people, etc. Write the responses given on the board. Ask each child to identify out loud or on paper names they have been called that make them angry. Talk about these out loud and discuss how it makes them feel and what they do when it happens.

Handicapping to Increase Fairness
(all disabilities, math, group activity)

Materials: none

Activity: These activities are designed to teach children the technique of handicapping to increase fairness in competitive game situations.

Problem: A bionic girl can jump thirty feet. You can jump only three feet. She wants to see who is best, but after three tries she is bored and you are tired of losing. What can you do to make the game enjoyable for both of you?

Some answers may be: play something else, tie something heavy to her legs so she can't jump as far, get a big spring or a rocket to help you go farther, see who can improve the most in three tries.

If the bionic girl can jump 30 feet and you can jump only three, how much head start do you need to come out even? If the bionic girl jumps exactly thirty feet each of three tries, but you jump a bit more than three feet each try who is getting better faster?

Barriers Checklist
(all disabilities, group activity)

Materials: copies of barrier checklist.

Activity: Have the childen in small groups assess their school using the checklist.

A barrier is something that makes it difficult or impossible for a disabled person to get into or around a building. Is your school barrier free? Use this checklist to find out. And if your school does not do very well on the checklist, don't be too surprised. Most buildings have barriers. And barriers can be changed.

If the main entrance to the school has a ramp it is barrier free. If it has stairs and no ramp it has a barrier.

YES NO

Are the door knobs of all main doors 3 feet from the ground so people in wheelchairs can reach them.

YES NO

Do the hallways have handrails to help people walk?

YES NO

Are there parking spaces reserved for disabled people? Are they near the building entrance? Are they 12 feet wide? Are at least 2 out of every 100 spaces reserved for people with disabilities?

YES NO

Are there curb cuts so that people in wheelchairs or with baby carriages or shopping carts can pass easily?
YES NO

Are there tactile markings (can be felt by touch) cut into the sidewalk to warn people who are blind?
YES NO

If your school has more than one floor, does it have an elevator?
YES NO

Does the elevator have braille markers for the floor buttons?
YES NO

Does the elevator have light and bell signals to help people who are blind or deaf to know when the elevator is ready?
YES NO

Are the doorways to all bathrooms at least 33 inches wide?
YES NO

Are the sinks low enough? (Get a chair and see if you can reach the sink while you're sitting in the chair.)
YES NO

Are the telephones in the building accessible? (Use the same test as for the sinks.)
YES NO

Are the fire alarms low enough for people in wheelchairs?
YES NO

Are there grab bars in the bathroom stalls so that people can lift themselves from a wheelchair to the toilet and back again?

YES NO

Are the windows 24 inches or 28 inches from the floor so that short people and people in wheelchairs can see out?

YES NO

Are the aisles in the classroom at least 32 inches wide so that people in wheelchairs, or on crutches, or with canes or walkers, can get around easily?

YES NO

Are there flashing lights for fire alarms so that deaf students will know if there's a fire?

YES NO

Are there picture signs to show the purpose of each room so that people who cannot read will know where to go?

YES NO

Total YES answers:
Total NO answers:

Multiply number of YES answers by 100. Divide by 18. 70% is a passing score.

JUST LIKE ME!

MORE RESOURCES

The activities in this book were adapted from *What's the Difference? Teaching Positive Attitudes Toward People with Disabilities* by Ellen Barnes, Carol Berrigan and Douglas Biklen, available from the Human Policy Press, P.O. Box 127, University Station, Syracuse, New York 13210.

What's the Difference? contains many more activities, an introductory chapter on teaching techniques, explanations of many disabilities and an extensive bibliography.

The Maine Developmental Disabilities Council has other publications which may be of help in promoting awareness of people with disabilities:

Jargon and Acronyms, a booklet of definitions; and

Special Education for Parents, a booklet about rights and responsibilities for parents of children with special needs.

Transition, an outline of services provided to young adults who are making the transition from school to adult life.

Some organizations in Maine who can supply awareness materials, information on disabilities and speakers for programs are:

Child and Family Institute
19 College Avenue
USM
Gorham, Maine 04038
780-5455

Maine Association of
Handicapped Persons
237 Oxford Street
Portland, Maine 04101
774-4360
800-492-0730

Maine Independent Living Center
74 Winthrop Street
Augusta, Maine 04330
622-5434

Pine Tree Epilepsy Association
622 Congress Street
Portland, Maine 04101
772-7847

Portland Coalition for the
Psychiatrically Labelled
P.O. Box 4138 Station A
Portland, Maine 04101
772-2208

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